

Historic and Architectural Resources of Coventry, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report



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Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

PRELIMINARY SURVEY REPORT

TOWN OF COVENTRY

February 1978

PLEASE NOTE:

This document is a reissue of the original survey book published in 1978. It has not been updated or corrected.

Since 1978, additional properties have been entered on the National Register, and new financial incentives are available for preservation of historic properties. For up-to-date information, please contact:

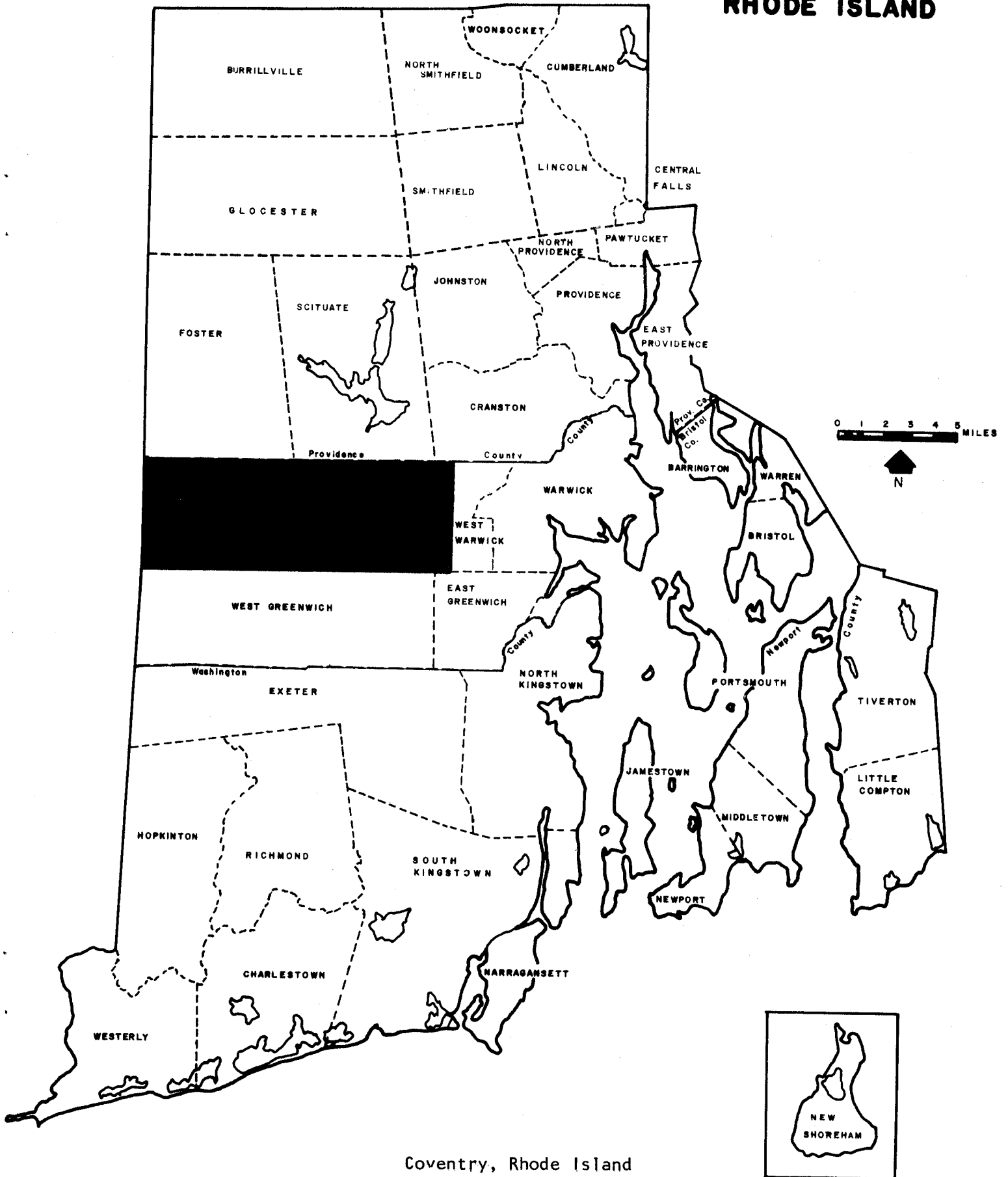
>Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission,
www.preservation.ri.gov, 401-222-2678

>Coventry Department of Planning and Development,
www.town.coventry.ri.us/planning.htm, 401-822-9181

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION

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RHODE ISLAND



PREFACE

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, established by the General Assembly in 1968, is charged with the responsibility of safeguarding Rhode Island's cultural heritage. In order to provide an overview of the physical record of this heritage, the Commission has initiated a "broadbrush" or preliminary planning survey of the rural and suburban towns of the state. The purpose of this initial inventory is to identify and record properties of historic and architectural significance in each town. Presently, archeological resources are treated through a separate survey effort being conducted by the Commission. The preliminary surveys provide a catalogue of nonrenewable cultural resources which is needed for a variety of planning purposes at the local, state and national levels. They identify sites, districts and structures eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and they become the basis for establishing historical preservation priorities based on problems and potentials discovered as part of the survey process.

The preliminary survey is accomplished by driving all public rights-of-way in a given town and noting on large-scale United States Geological Survey maps (or other maps that may be more appropriate) each building or site of particular architectural, visual, cultural or historic significance. Each property is photographed and recorded on a standard data sheet which includes a physical description and notations concerning

history, use, condition and architectural style or period. The significance of each property is determined in a preliminary fashion and properties are designated as being in one of three categories: properties already on or approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places; properties recommended at the staff level for nomination to the Register; and other significant properties, some of which, with further study and review, may be determined to be eligible for the Register. Archeological sites are covered in separate, but coordinated, preliminary surveys and are mentioned only incidentally in these studies.

Previous studies are reviewed and town histories, reports and other readily available information are researched to ensure that all published historic sites and structures are included in the study. Local planners and historians are consulted wherever possible.

Upon completion of the survey, finished maps are developed and a brief report written. The result is a preliminary document--useful in the interim before a full-scale intensive cultural resource survey of the community has been completed. The Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission intends to conduct such a survey as soon as funds and staffing are available.

INTRODUCTION

The following study covers the historical and architectural resources of Coventry. It provides the basic information needed so that cultural resources can begin to be properly considered in making future planning decisions at all levels. The report includes a brief, illustrated account of Coventry's architectural and developmental history. Section II is a comprehensive list of properties in Coventry already listed in the National Register of Historic Places, followed by those approved for the Register and those recommended for nomination to the National Register as a result of the preliminary survey. Section III is an annotated inventory of properties of historical and architectural importance in the town.

The inventory numbers are keyed to the small-scale locational map at the rear of this publication. For more precise information on the location of properties, reference should be made to the large, preliminary-broadbrush, cultural-resource survey map prepared by the Historical Preservation Commission and drawn at a scale of one inch to one thousand feet.

The Commission would like to thank the many Coventry officials, residents and scholars who assisted in the conduct of the preliminary survey and in the publication of this report.

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I. ANALYSIS

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Coventry, the largest township in Rhode Island, is situated in the northwestern portion of Kent County, about nineteen miles southwest of Providence. Rectangular in shape and 62.2 square miles in area, it is approximately fourteen miles in length from east to west, and four miles wide. Parts of Foster, Scituate and Cranston border Coventry on the north; Warwick and West Warwick border it on the east; East and West Greenwich border it on the south; and Connecticut borders it on the west. The central and western sections of the town are largely rural, rolling and wooded, with a sparse population and few village centers. Eastern Coventry, by contrast is more densely populated, with numerous compact mill villages, one beside the other, creating linear urbanized zones sited along the many falls of the Flat and Pawtuxet Rivers.

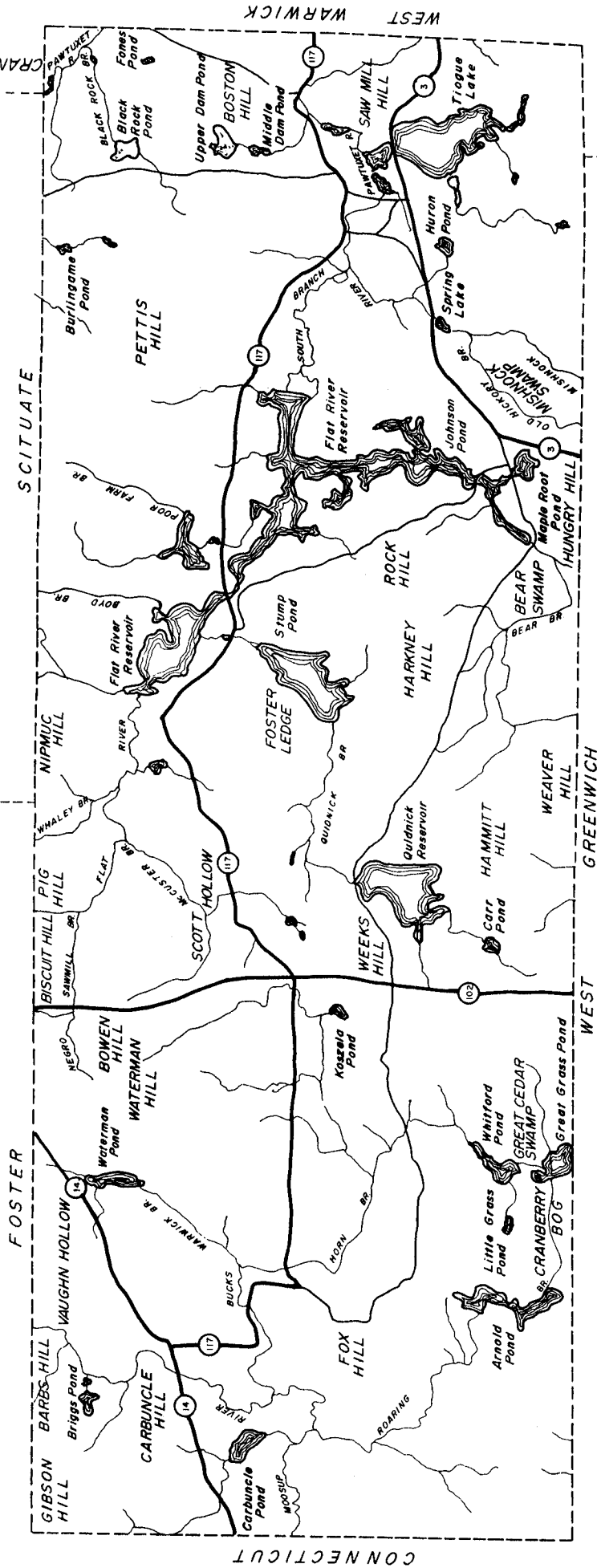
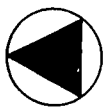
Coventry topography consists of rocky hills with glacial outcroppings, abundant ponds, streams and brooks and considerable woodlands made up of red and white pine, maple and oak. The Flat River cuts diagonally across the middle of the township from east to west, moving slowly through rolling terrain and draining into numerous ponds and lake-reservoirs. This south branch of the Pawtuxet River is so named because it falls no more than sixteen inches to the mile in the six-mile stretch of river near the village of Washington.

The most fertile farmlands are situated near streams on formerly marshy bottom land. The areas chosen for camp site

settlements by the prehistoric ancestors of the Narragansett and Nipmuc Indians were, for the most part, those same marshy open meadows that would provide pasture lands for the early settlers.

EARLY HISTORY AND SETTLEMENT (1643-1806)

The town lies within the Shawomet Purchase of 1643, in which lands including present-day Coventry, Warwick and West Warwick were sold to Samuel Gorton and eleven associates by Miantonomi, chief sachem of the Narragansett Indians. Coventry's northern and southern borders coincide with those of the purchase. Initially part of the town of Warwick, the western areas of the purchase remained relatively isolated and uninhabited for most of the seventeenth century. A survey was not undertaken until 1692. The land was not divided all at one time but in four successive tracts, starting in 1701 and ending in 1735. A re-survey of the colony line in 1739 added a strip of land on the western border. This was laid out in fourteen additional lots. The population of Warwick more than doubled in the first thirty years of the eighteenth century and people began to move to what is now Coventry. With increased settlement, the problem of being remote from the center of government became acute, and petitions were addressed to the General Assembly suggesting that this western territory be set off as a new township. Thus, in 1741, Coventry became the Rhode Island Colony's sixteenth incorporated township.



COVENTRY, RHODE ISLAND

PHYSICAL FEATURES

MARCH, 1978
0 2000 4000
SCALE OF FEET